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SUBJECT: LASHKARS FORMING, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE AWAKENING COUNCILS

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. In various agencies within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and parts of the Northwest Frontier Province, local communities are raising homegrown security forces to fight militants, known as lashkars. These lashkars are fully supported logistically by their local communities, including food, weapons, and housing, which provides greater loyalty from both the individuals and the communities they represent. However, this support is proving to be a double-edged sword in that any support provided by outside forces is viewed as an attempt to "buy off" these lashkars. Additionally, these forces are proving to be only loyal to their own communities, further reinforcing that these community forces are not equal to the Tribal Awakenings of Iraq. Although these lashkars are a positive sign for Pakistan, they should not be viewed as a replacement for proper military action in these troubled areas. End Summary and Comment.

Some Tribes Forming Militias Against Militants

¶2. (C) Local populations, primarily in Bajaur, Khyber, and Orakzai tribal agencies and parts of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), particularly the northern districts of Dir and Buner, have raised lashkars against militants in their areas. A lashkar is a tribal militia - a group of men from the community who join together on the decision of the tribal jirga and the Political Agent to address a specific security issue. They are supported by the community, which provides them weapons, food, vehicles, housing, etc. The GOP, specifically the Frontier Corps and the Interior Ministry, are actively encouraging the formation of lashkars to supplement understaffed security forces and mobilize communities against militants.

¶3. (C) The Salarzai tribe in Bajaur Agency (along the border with Kunar province in Afghanistan) was the first significant lashkar raised. Since then, others have been raised, including near Peshawar. The degree to which they have "fought" militants varies widely - the Salarzai have been in some serious fights, while other lashkars simply decreed militants were not welcome, burned a house or two, and declared success. In some places, lashkars have fought alongside Frontier Corps or in parallel to their efforts; however it is not clear they are actually fighting together anywhere. They have no training and few weapons with which to counter battle-hardened taliban and other Pakistani militants. There has been some retaliation by militants,

most notably the week of October 7, when a suicide bomber attacked a jirga in Orakzai that was meeting to discuss raising a lashkar (more than 100 people were reportedly killed).

Round-up of Lashkars to Date

¶4. (U) At this point, reports indicate that on October 4, the Mohmand tribesmen (in the FATA) joined forces with the area's security elements against one of the largest militancy contingents in the region. In the Shabqadar area of Charsadda district, adjacent to Mohmand agency, locals and community leaders supported area police in a clash against the militants in late September. In an attempt to drive taliban from the Khyber agency, approximately 3000 Mullagori tribesmen formed a lashkar, and on September 25, they claim that they arrested several militants and destroyed the militants' three area hideouts. More recently, three major sub-tribes of the main Afridi tribe in Khyber agency also raised a lashkar in response to the growing militancy.

Limitation on Lashkar Phenomenon

¶5. (C) While the lashkars are a good sign that some communities have had enough of accommodating militants, they are not equal to the Tribal Awakening of Iraq. First, each lashkar will defend only the community from which it came. Inter-tribal rivalries are centuries old and strong, and the likelihood of various lashkars working jointly against the

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militants is not high. (Note: Head of the Frontier Corps, MG Tariq Khan, emphasized this point to a visiting delegation on October 20 - see septel. End note.) Second, they are primarily forming in areas in which there is a Frontier Corps or military presence and engagement - tribes are not taking on the militants in areas in which they do not have backup. Third, the phenomenon is geographically limited - it is unlikely to spread to North or South Waziristan, where militants have destroyed the traditional tribal leadership through targeted killings.

Should the GOP - or Others - Offer Concrete Support?

¶6. (C) On the question of external support, senior Pakistani military officials and parliamentarians from the tribal areas have been cautious. The strength of the lashkar, they tell us, comes precisely from the fact that it is supported by the community. One of the biggest handicaps the Pakistani military has had over the years in the tribal areas is that it is seen as a "foreign" force -- different ethnically, linguistically, and administratively. If the military (or another entity) were to start to openly support lashkars from outside, they would be seen as having been "bought off," quickly be discredited, and lose the support of the local community. The Frontier Corps leadership thus opposes providing the lashkars with payments or additional arms, although the FATA Secretariat has qualified this statement to note that the GOP has historically provided some "secret" assistance in the form of guns, ammunition, and food to lashkars via tribal leaders.

¶7. (C) However, in recent meetings with Embassy personnel, both President Asif Zardari and Interior Minister Rehman Malik have advanced the idea of financial support for the lashkars, in order to encourage them to continue to act. They have reportedly suggested providing 50 million rupees (616,000 USD), distributed through the Frontier Corps and the Political Agents.

¶8. (C) The motivation behind the forming of the lashkars is also important. Lashkars may be motivated by other objectives such as settling old personal scores rather than

the longer-term goal of permanently denying space to militants. Communities have also seen the results of military action in Bajaur, including an exodus of poorly treated internally displaced persons (IDPs) and destruction of their homes. They badly want to avoid both scenarios and are asking militants to leave because they draw that kind of attention. This does not mean these communities welcome the extension of the writ of the government into their areas. What they want is the status quo ante - to be left alone.

19. (C) Comment. Lashkars remain a positive sign in the short term, especially as a demonstration to the larger Pakistani audience that this is Pakistan's fight. The Pakistani military is using them to put additional pressure on militant locations. The coordination between the military and the tribes is a positive development in its own right, helping diminish the previous "us against them" environment of earlier Pakistani Army forays into the tribal areas. We should resist, however, any temptation to see this phenomenon as the beginning of a popular uprising against militants that would obviate the need for continued military action or the long-term presence of more organized heavily armed forces.
End Comment.
PATTERSON